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SUBJECT: THE AMBASSADOR RAISES MISSION PROFILE IN TAMALE AND KUMASI

REF: ACCRA 2480

¶1. Summary: During an intensive four-day trip to the Northern Region (November 29–December 2), historically plagued by ethnic conflict, but currently poor but peaceful, Ambassador and Mission team engaged in many successful programs that showcased transformational diplomacy at its best. The highlights of the Kumasi trip were two Muslim outreach events -- the commissioning of an Office of Defense Cooperation health clinic and the Ambassador's forum with key Muslim leaders. Many Muslim leaders praised the United States and Mission outreach efforts, and at least two key hardliners reportedly shifted to more positive views of the U.S. The Ambassador received an enthusiastic welcome and extensive media coverage (see septel) – some still running in local papers – and raised the positive profile of the Mission at events in Tamale (Northern Region), Kumasi (Ashanti Region) and Techiman (Brong Ahafo Region, where she swore in 49 new Peace Corps volunteers).

¶2. Interlocutors warmly welcomed the entourage, identified need for technical training and ethical standards for radio talk shows, assistance with information technology (Northern Regional Minister) and skills training for unemployed and disaffected youth. We witnessed a USG-funded conflict resolution conference underway in Tamale, and the Ambassador extended the U.S.-Ghana Resource Center MOU in Tamale, presented Special Self-Help (SSH) and Democracy and Human Rights Fund (DHRF) grants totaling \$64,000 and visited self help projects and a successful USAID-funded agricultural program. A typical scene was the singing and dancing women in Gurugu who welcomed the Ambassador to their village where they produce shea butter with the help of an SSH-funded grinding mill. End summary.

Northern Region

¶3. In Tamale, the Ambassador and her Embassy team met with Northern Regional Minister Boniface Abubakar Sadiq, renewed a Memorandum of Understanding with our Ghana-U.S. Resource Center (American Corner), held her first press conference/luncheon for press and NGOs, and launched four DHRF grants totaling \$35,000 and 10 SSH grants totaling \$29,000 for groups in northern Ghana. She also met with about 10 Amcits in the region, and she visited SSH and USAID projects around Tamale as well as a school for the deaf, where a Peace Corps Volunteer was making significant breakthroughs with visual arts training. Between signing the MOU for the American Corner and awarding the SSH grants, the Ambassador made a special appearance at a PAS-sponsored "Conflict Management, Peer Mediation and Peace Building" workshop for secondary school teachers. The seminar was taught by 2002 IV Georgette Francois, using skills she learned as part of a nine-member Ghanaian team of judges and lawyers who received eight weeks of training in alternative dispute resolution techniques at the Center for African Peace and Conflict Resolution, California State University.

Ethnic Conflict: Regional Minister Saddiq, an ethnic Gonja, told the Ambassador he was genuinely committed to helping reduce ethnic conflict, which is integrally tied to land disputes. (Note: The Northern Region has a history of ethnic conflict. The Ya Na (Dagomba chief), murdered and dismembered in 2002 along with 40 others, has still not been buried because of a succession dispute between the Abudu and Andani "gates" to which there is no end in sight. End note.) Saddiq requested USG support for a conference focused on conflict resolution. A group of NGOs told the Ambassador they supported the idea of such a conference, citing poor communication between policymakers and those at the grass roots as a major obstacle to peace building. (Note: At the New Patriotic Party convention on December 17, the Regional Minister told PolChief that President Kufuor supported having the conference. Saddiq is eager to move ahead with it. End note.)

Economy: Minister Saddiq hoped for USG assistance in improving the region's access to Information Technology, which he said is "seriously deficient." There is little industry in the poor Northern Region, in part because of water shortages and bad transportation infrastructure. Contacts agreed that improving the economy was key to reducing conflict in the region, but noted that unresolved

and ongoing problems make it difficult to attract investors. Almost everyone raised the issue of high unemployment among youth and a lack of vocational training opportunities as factors fueling tensions in the region.

Rule of Law: In response to Ambassador's queries about an attack in Tamale on the Presiding Member of the District Assembly and other Assembly members because they voted against the president's nominee for the post of Metropolitan Chief Executive, Saddiq attributed the violence to ignorance about procedures. His personal intervention, however, ensured that the perpetrators were arrested and will likely be prosecuted. The Minister and others identified as a high priority, the need to train local police in human rights and community policing. (Note: Ambassador will seek to include northern law enforcement personnel during upcoming ICITAP training in February.)

The Media: The Ambassador held her first press conference and the PAO hosted a media roundtable for the Ambassador, where she highlighted U.S. engagement and assistance in Ghana and challenged journalists to report responsibly and behave ethically. Journalists noted that conflict in the region is at times exacerbated by irresponsible radio talk shows. They cited the lack of training for talk show hosts and the tendency of media owners to cut corners in favor of increasing profits. This has led to a plethora of call-in radio shows where callers, secure in their anonymity, make outrageous and unsubstantiated claims that often go unchallenged by the program host. Some suggested that additional training and access to delay technology (currently absent in Ghana) would enable radio stations to screen inflammatory or irresponsible commentary, thus reducing the potential for conflict. They also advocated the establishment of an effective oversight board to help maintain broadcasting quality and integrity.

Ashanti Region

14. The Ambassador met with Ashanti Regional Minister S.K. Boafo and the Asantahene (the traditional leader of the Ashantis) and gave remarks at a packed FCS workshop of top Ghanaian firms aimed at promoting U.S. business opportunities. She commissioned a clinic in a predominantly Muslim area outside of Kumasi built with Office of Defense Cooperation (ODC) Humanitarian Assistance Funds, underscoring that it was also World AIDS Day. The Clinic dedication drew nearly 300 persons, elders and top Imams of the area. While some traditional Muslim men did not shake her hand during introductions at the dedication ceremony, they all jockeyed and jostled for a photo op with her during the ensuing ribbon cutting and tour of the beautiful facility. Later, the Ambassador fielded questions during a wide-ranging issue forum she hosted with 50 Muslim leaders from across the North at a local hotel. Noting the absence of women among the group, the Ambassador told them she was sure that the next time such an event was arranged, there would be women among them. Everyone agreed that this would be the case next time.

Politics: This is the NPP's heartland and the home turf of President Kufuor. The military has helped the police to reduce a rash of armed robberies, the Regional Minister told the Ambassador. The Asantehene detailed his work in education, guinea worm eradication, HIV/AIDS and alternative dispute resolution. The Ambassador praised his role in informally mediating the Dagbon crisis in the Northern Region. The Asantehene thanked the Ambassador for her efforts to support education and asked for assistance in building a small library with information for HIV/AIDS orphans.

Muslim Outreach: Muslim leaders told the Ambassador that the perception of America has changed because of our outreach efforts over the past few years. Multiple Muslim speakers condemned terrorism and praised the U.S. (although Kumasi has a radical Muslim element.) Our Muslim roundtable interlocutors appealed for help with skills training and education. A Muslim Member of Parliament highlighted the need to combat youth unemployment and noted some discrimination against Muslims in Ghana's public institutions (an issue discussed in post's International Religious Freedom Report.)

Comment

15. As reported in reftel, the Ambassador's trip received extensive and positive coverage from print, Internet and broadcast media outlets, focused on the most tangible outcomes of the trip: a new MOU with our American Corner in Tamale, new SSH and DHRF grants, and the commissioning of the clinic and Self Help projects. Contacts appreciated the fact

that this was the Ambassador first substantial trip outside of Accra as Ambassador. The Muslim outreach and business activities were particularly successful. We saw a great deal of good will for America in Ghana, which is greatly boosted by our assistance programs, even the low budget ones like Self Help and DHRF, and by our hard-working Peace Corps Volunteers living in the regions. We will explore possibilities for supporting a conference in Tamale focused on conflict resolution as well as ways to meet the strong demand for skills training. End comment.

BRIDGEWATER